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SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CEN - ROIS BEAL, DAVID WOLFE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [BH](#)

SUBJECT: FORMER BELIZE PM CHARGED WITH THEFT OF USD 10 MILLION

Ref: BELMOPAN 0130

¶1. (U) Amidst cries from a small crowd shouting, "leave our daddy alone", Said Musa, former Prime Minister of Belize, entered the courtroom today to face a single charge of theft of USD 10 million alleged to have occurred in December 2007 (reftel). Over 40 police officers were dispatched to the scene in what was a rather slim turnout of fewer than 50 People's United Party (PUP) supporters to what was called by some a political funeral. Musa, still the Area Representative for the Ft. George district, looked only slightly more somber than usual as he faced the charge.

¶2. (U) The last case of political wrong-doing that actually went to trial was concluded in 1997, when Foreign Minister V.H. Courtenay was acquitted of criminal charges for theft and misappropriation. More recent matters, including the case of theft in early 2008 against former Minister of Health Jose Coye, failed to pass through preliminary hearings. A top reporter in Belize suggested, "it was unlikely this trial would result in a conviction since the courts couldn't even prosecute the former PM's press secretary for a stick of weed", referring to one recent case of political impropriety. The picture of imbalance in Belize's justice system was made clear when seven defense attorneys approached the bench confronted by a single prosecutor representing the GOB.

¶3. (U) After his arraignment, the former PM said this was a case of "political victimization". His trial will commence January 9, 2009, and he was released on USD 50,000 bail.

¶4. (U) Former Minister of Home Affairs and Musa's right-hand man, Ralph Fonseca, will be arraigned Friday, December 5, for a similar charge, also in Belmopan where the theft allegedly occurred.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Post believes that the GOB will not prevail in this case -- the judiciary just does not have enough resources to successfully prosecute a powerful figure such as Musa. However, by bringing the case forward, the United Democratic Party (UDP) has shown a good faith effort to fulfill a campaign promise to fight corruption and maintain transparent government. The publicity around this trial may also bolster the GOB's case against the Belize Bank in an attempt to retrieve the stolen funds. End Comment.

DIFFILY